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A
S E R M O N,

PREACHED IN

The Parish Church of Dronfield,

IN THE
COUNTY OF DERBY,

On WEDNESDAY, March 9th, 1796,

BEING
THE DAY APPOINTED
FOR
A GENERAL FAST.

BY THE REV. J. RUSSELL.

SHEFFIELD:
Printed at the ~~Britannia Press~~, by J. NORTHALL.

1796.

Recd March 20, 1845
Gift of the J. A. Shaw
of Boston

To the Public.

THE following hasty Composition was preached at Dronfield, on the Day appointed for the late General Fast. It was not drawn up with the most distant Thought of its meeting the public Eye. My Audience have requested me to publish it, as thinking it might be productive of some Good; and with this Request I have thought proper to comply.

J. RUSSELL,

DRONFIELD, *Derbyshire, March 16th,*
1796.

THE PUBLIC EYE

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of the Day appointed for the late General Pitt Rivers

and the public eye. My Audience have requested me
to publish it, thinking it might be productive of some

good, and with this Request I have thought proper to

comply.

Yours truly,
J. W. B. B. B.

Printed and Published by J. W. B. B. B.

London: J. W. B. B. B.

A S E R M O N,

Etc.

JEREMIAH, 34th Chap. 17th Ver.

Therefore thus saith the Lord, ye have not hearkened unto me, in proclaiming Liberty, every one to his Brother, and every Man to his Neighbour: Behold I proclaim a Liberty for you saith the Lord; to the Sword, to the Pestilence, and to the Famine; and I will make you to be removed into all the Kingdoms of the Earth,

THESE Words of the Prophet allude to an humane Institution in the Law of Moses, by which it ^{was} enjoined, that if any Israelite, being reduced to Poverty and Distress, should sell himself to his opulent Neighbour, he was to be discharged from his Servitude in the Year of Jubilee. Now among the Jews there were two distinct Jubilees: One was the greater Jubilee, or Sabbatical Year, which was held after every Expiration of Seven times Seven Years, and consequently was celebrated every fiftieth Year; when all Estates and Possessions that had been alienated and sold, were to be freely restored to the Families of the original Proprietors.

But this is not the Year of Jubilee alluded to in my Text; but the lesser one, or Year of Release which was celebrated every 7th Year; when every Man, who had sold himself for a Servant, was to be restored to his full Liberty: so that the longest Term any Israelite could lawfully remain in a state of servitude

servitude was not more than six Years ; and even *during* that Time, it was strictly ordained, that he should not be treated as a *slave*, but only as an *hired* Servant ; and after the expiration of this period, he was to be restored to the bosom of his Family and his Country, and have the full enjoyment of all the Rights of a free Citizen. But this wise and humane Regulation, was in a short space of Time entirely disregarded ; the Rich and Powerful retained their poor and defenceless Brethren in a state of Servitude, in defiance of the positive command of God. For this, and their other Violations of the Divine Laws, (but most particularly for being guilty of this crying sin of Oppression,) the Judgements of God were poured out upon the Land. When the Babylonish Army spread Desolation and Dismay through the Country, their King Zedekiah then thought it high time to endeavour to avert the divine Judgements, by attempting something like a national Reform ; and particularly to break the Yoke of Oppression. In order to this, he published a Decree, that every Person held in unjust Servitude should be immediately set free. This was indeed complied with for a little while ; but their powerful and merciless Oppressors soon after reduced them again to their former state of Servitude and Bondage. Upon which, Jeremiah denounced this Prophecy against them : “ Therefore thus saith the Lord, ye have not hearkened unto me in proclaiming Liberty every one to his Brother, and every Man to his Neighbour : Behold I proclaim a Liberty for *you* saith the Lord, to the Sword, to the Pestilence, and to the Famine ; and I will make you to be removed into all the Kingdoms of the Earth.” In less than two Years, the Threats here denounced
were

were executed upon them to the utmost ; the Chaldean Army sacked and burnt every Town and City in the Kingdom ; the great Oppressors were massacred ; the few Inhabitants who escaped the Sword were led into Captivity, from whence they never returned ; and only the oppressed Poor were spared, to dress the Vines and cultivate the Grounds.

From this and other Passages of Scripture, it appears, that a state of Slavery and Bondage is not consistent with the Will and Design of our gracious Creator ; nay, it is even *contrary to Nature* itself. It is not possible for us to conceive any Motive whatever, that could induce the Supreme Being to create the Human Race, but only in order to communicate to them part of his own Happiness & infinite Perfections. Accordingly we find that this has actually been done : That God has been pleased to confer on the rational Part of the Creation, a Freedom of Will and Liberty of Thought, which no human Force can controul. Every Man feels in his own Mind, that he has the Power of choosing Good and refusing Evil : And indeed *without* this, Religion and Morality could not subsist ; there could be neither Merit nor Demerit in any of our Actions ; and consequently we could not be liable either to Reward or Punishment for them. Hence it seems to follow, that Liberty is the unalienable birth-right, the destined portion of the whole Human Race. By this Term, I mean, a power of self-government ; a *rational Liberty*, only under the restraint and controul of the Laws of God, and the Laws of our Country, founded on the eternal Rules of Justice. Such is the rational Liberty which this happy Country enjoys, in its fullest Extent, at this Day ; and may it continue to enjoy this, one
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of the choicest of Heaven's blessings till Time shall be no more.

But this Term, pleasant and delightful in its very sound, *may be*, and *has been*, perverted to the vilest Purposes, by artful, factious, and unprincipled Men.---In the neighbouring Country of France, we have seen a set of Men, who had contrived to raise themselves to be the Heads of successive Factions; and who, under the specious mask of Liberty, have been guilty of the most horrid Cruelties, and the most atrocious Enormities, that the World ever before was Witness to. All Morality, and all Religion, natural and revealed, have been spurned, derided, and trampled under Foot;---every Obligation that can bind Man to Man, has been broken through; Depredation and Plunder, Slaughter and Massacre, with every possible Shape of Misery, have been let loose on that wretched, devoted People, with unbridled Fury.---And though the Situation of the Inhabitants there, be not quite so dreadful now, as it was a Year ago; yet still Robbery, and Pillage, and private Assassinations are every where practised, as if there was neither Law nor Government among them. From one Extremity of the Country to the other, no Man enjoys Security, either in his Property or his Person. Their present Government does not indeed assume so *bloody* an Aspect as the foregoing ones; yet is it equally arbitrary and despotic. It has rapaciously seized the little Specie that remained in the Country; and as to those who had none, the Productions of their Lands are seized without making the least Compensation, and their Persons are dragged away to serve in their Armies. In short, under the Pretext of Liberty, the most horrible Despotism and Tyranny

Tyranny is established among them, that was ever before experienced on the Face of this Globe. Some may think it strange, that such Tyranny should be submitted to; the Reason is, the Power of the Sword is in the Hands of their Tyrants.

The Picture here drawn I believe is not overcharged:--- and yet there is not wanting among us, a small Number of Men, who wish to introduce this Mode of Government, and these horrible Scenes, into this happy Land; who have dared to treat with Insult and Outrage our most gracious Sovereign; the most mild, humane, and benevolent Monarch that ever swayed a Sceptre; and who has never wished to invade the Rights of any one Individual in his Dominions.---These Men have dared to revile and vilify our Laws, though the most equitable and mild that any Nation upon Earth ever enjoyed; Laws which, with a strong Hand, curb and restrain the most powerful, from the slightest Act of Injury or Oppression, towards the meanest Individual among us; and which guard the poor Man's Cottage with a Barrier far stronger than a Wall of Brass.--- Every Member of this flourishing & happy Community, enjoys Liberty in its purest Essence, and in its most substantial Form. If it was to be stretched farther, it would be destructive of itself.

But the Liberty which the Men I am speaking of, wish to introduce among us, is a wild, impracticable, ferocious, savage Freedom; implying a Right in every Man, to plunder and butcher his Neighbour. But what Sort of Men are these, who wish to introduce such Scenes of Anarchy and Confusion among us? they are either idle, dreaming Speculatists, who
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brood over Schemes in their Closets, utterly impossible ever to be realized. Or they are vain, ignorant, and conceited Men, who have the presumption to suppose they know Things they are totally unacquainted with. Or they are perturbed, factious, restless Spirits, who wish for a Change, though for the worse; and who would be disgusted with a long Continuance even of Prosperity and Happiness itself. But the greatest part it is to be feared, consist of desperate Men, Bankrupt in Property and Character; who, amidst Scenes of Tumult and Confusion, hope that something might turn up to their Advantage. However it does not appear that we have any Thing to fear at present, either from our Enemies abroad, or from Faction at Home. Our Enemies are in a State of Beggary and Bankruptcy, of Wretchedness and Misery, unexampled in any former Age, or any other Nation. Faction at Home is effectually curbed and restrained by the good Sense and spirited Exertions of the Body of the People. But if it should please God, for the Ingratitude, the Vices and Impenitence of these Nations, to visit them with his *severest* Judgments;---the Introduction of such a Mode of Government, and such wild Schemes of Liberty as I have been mentioning, would be the Inflicting of Punishments far heavier, than the Sword, the Pestilence and Famine combined:---may our Sins never call down such a dreadful Visitation upon us.

Many and great are the Mercies and Blessings, which God has been graciously pleased to shower down on this much-favoured Isle; for which, I fear, we are greatly deficient in making suitable Returns. All Kinds of Provisions and the first Necessaries of Life, are indeed at this Time at a Price the
most

most enormous, and hitherto unknown among us ; by which the lower Classes of People must necessarily severely suffer. This is however, but in Common to us with other Nations, and even in a less Degree. But I trust this will be but of very short continuance. In the mean Time, I hope, that their more opulent Neighbours will hold out a liberal Hand for the Succour and Relief of their indigent Brethren. This will be a strict Compliance with the Terms of the Fast, which God has declared will alone be acceptable to him:---this is the Fast that I have chosen ; to deal thy Bread to the Hungry, and that thou bring the Poor that are cast out, to thy House ; when thou seest the Naked that thou cover him, and that thou hide not thyself from thine own Flesh. But with this single Exception, we have in all other Respects, the strongest Motives for pious Gratitude. Our Country is not laid waste by hostile Armies, nor our Fields stained with the Blood of their Possessors : the Hand that sows, reaps the Crop in full Peace ; and every Man enjoys the Rewards of his honest Industry, in full Security. Our Trade, our Manufactures, our Commerce, and consequently our Opulence, have lately increased to a Pitch, never before experienced in this, or any other Nation. In these, and many other Respects, we enjoy very great and important Advantages, above any Country on the Face of the Earth.

But have we testified a proper sense of Gratitude to God, the Author of all Good, for these Blessings, by shunning all Things which he has forbidden, and acting in obedience to his Commands?---I fear far otherwise. I shall just slightly mention some of our National Crimes and Corruptions that call loudly for a Reform :

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The first of these, is the Slave Trade, and the Cruelty and Oppression exercised on the poor Africans. This is still continued, though it be a Disgrace to the British Name; though it be in direct Opposition to the Genius and Spirit of our Holy Religion, and acting in open Defiance of every claim of Humanity and common Justice.

The next that I shall mention, is a Vice that is but lately sprung up among us; I mean, deep speculations on Grain, and the first necessities of Life. He that with-holdeth Corn says the wise Man, the People shall curse him; but Blessings shall be on the Head of him that selleth it. When Provisions were at such a Price as one would have thought would have been sufficient to satisfy Avarice itself; yet these speculating Men still with-held them, in hopes thereby of causing a still higher Advance. Such Conduct is Cruel and Criminal in a very high Degree; as endeavouring to counteract the Bounty of Nature, and to intercept the Blessings of Providence.

As to our other national Corruptions, I have but to enumerate the black Catalogue, which I last Year mentioned when I addressed you on this Occasion; such as, a general Indifference and Contempt for Religion and the Duties of it; a gross neglect and Profanation of the Day particularly set apart for the public Worship of our God; and when attending thereon, in how cold, how lifeless, how unanimated a Manner are the Devotions offered up? Profane Oaths and Imprecations may still be constantly heard among us: Sensuality, Dissipation, and every species of Intemperance, Riot, and Excess still overspread the Land. These Vices call loudly for an immediate Reform, if we wish for a continuance of the Blessings of God

God among us. Let every one of us then resolve without delay, to break off our Sins by Repentance, that so Iniquity may not be our Ruin, and contribute also to the Ruin of our Country.

War, in its most hideous and most ghastly Form still continues to desolate the Earth; and is conducted, on the part of our Enemies, with unprecedented Acts of Cruelty. Vast preparations are now making for fresh Scenes of Devastation and Bloodshed. O gracious God! that thy Children should thus continue to slaughter each other, and to mangle and deface the Work of thy Hands!--May it be thy good Pleasure to hasten that blessed Time, when Nation shall not lift up Sword against Nation, neither shall they learn War any more; but the Instruments of Death be converted into the Implements of peaceful Industry: Grant this O gracious God, for the sake of thy Dear Son, to whom be ascribed, &c.

not be our ruin and condemnation in the eyes of God.